

**MEETING SUMMARY #6
WSF COMMUNITY MEETING
BAINBRIDGE ISLAND COMMONS, BAINBRIDGE, WA
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2009 6:30 – 8:30 P.M.**

Note: This meeting summary represents notes from the Washington State Department of Transportation Ferries Division (WSF) Community Meeting, and is not a formal transcript or minutes. It is provided as a record for the staff and public in attendance, and other interested parties.

Welcome and Introductions

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley

David welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming. He introduced his WSF staff members as well as the Ferry Advisory Committee (FAC) chair Torin Larsen and other FAC members who were in attendance, then briefly went over the agenda and noted that there would be time for public comment at the end of the meeting.

Route & Community Specific Issues

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley

David apologized for the service disruption caused by the removal of the Tacoma from service last Thursday morning. Crews needed to perform repairs to the vessel's steering system. Bremerton and Bainbridge were both affected; by midmorning on Friday both routes were restored to full service.

David also discussed the construction work going on at the Eagle Harbor maintenance facility. The building is being remodeled and this work is critical to us. The reports from our Terminal Engineering staff are that everything is going very well. All sixteen of the drilled shafts under the building are in place, and they are almost done filling them with concrete. We are at the place in the work where the riskiest period is past; we've seen what's in the walls and know what we're dealing with. The work is on schedule and should be complete by the summer of 2011.

Clarifying Questions from Audience

1. There is a group on the island that is trying to stop us from using too much electricity on cold days. They want everyone to cut back during a 2 hour period in the mornings. Would it be possible on weekdays from 7-9:00 am for Eagle Harbor to conserve electricity during that period?

I will bring that up with Vern Day.

2. I'm hearing more grumblings about the standing water on the pedestrian overpass in Seattle; is that your responsibility or the city's?
That belongs to the city.
Who would I contact about that?
SDOT. I believe they redid that not too long ago. I thought the issue was resolved.
They didn't improve the drainage. It can be dangerous, especially when it's freezing.
I will get a name and forward it to you.
3. Tell me more about the piling work. Is it all done?
Yes I believe so. There will be no further pile driving activity on that job.
All of it's done, with no noise?
Yes. I will double check on that and get back to you.
4. On the mezzanine level at the terminal next to the bike racks somebody welded on u-bars that prevent us from being able to slide our bikes down the concrete ramp. Now we have to lift and carry them down. It's over by the flagpole; maybe it was a skateboarding issue, but it's very inconvenient for the bicyclists.
We will look into that.
5. Have the new boats been purchased with a maintenance agreement?
I'm not sure what you mean by a maintenance agreement, do you mean a warranty?
Yes.
There will be a period of time after the boats are constructed for testing and sea trials. During that time the responsibility is still with the builder if anything goes wrong.
But there's no long term agreement?
I'm not sure how long it will be.
6. Why spend money on rehab here when you're doing less work on the boats? You can only work during the day.
It's true we can only run one shift, but our people are dispatched out of the facility all over the system to help maintain our fleet. They were called out when the Tacoma went down, and when the Klahowya was recently in dry-dock at Todd our people were working in the engine room while Todd worked on the passenger cabin.
That's my point; there's less work being done here.
When the steel electrics were tied up here it gave people the image of lots of boats and work going on. There is actually more work for them now as the fleet ages; more preventative work. I realize that the Eagle Harbor facility is a sore point for many in this community. That issue was discussed with the Legislature and they authorized us to go ahead with the rehab, so that's what we're doing.

Do you feel as though the facility is being used to its maximum potential?
Yes, and it will be even better when it is remodeled, because it has been redesigned as a maintenance facility, which it was not originally built for. There were weeks with no boats at the facility.

They were working on boats; maybe they weren't at the facility, but the crews are constantly working to maintain our fleet.

If the people are always deployed to do work that can't be done at Eagle Harbor, how do you justify the big expense of remodeling the facility?

There is work done on site as well as work performed off site. The facility is the hub for all of the resources used to maintain the fleet and terminals.

7. I feel bad for you being handicapped here with the hours you're allowed to work. Shipyards don't work like that; it's inefficient to not be able to do work above and below the water at the same time, in order to be able to keep the boats out of service for the shortest period possible.

In an ideal world a lot of things would be different. I feel very good about the facility. I understand that it's a sore point here.

New Vessel Program

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley

David discussed the construction of the new ferry at Todd Shipyard. We are currently undergoing construction of the first 64-car ferry. The project is on time and on budget; it is looking like a boat at this point rather than a bunch of pieces of steel. We have monthly meetings with Todd Shipyard which are very informative. It will be completed by the end of June next year, and then there will be testing and sea trials for 4-6 weeks. We expect the new vessel to be in service on the Port Townsend / Keystone run in August of 2010. This is our first new boat in 10-12 years and we are very pleased. We recently had a bid opening for 2 more 64-car ferries with an option for a third. The bid came in much better than the first bid, so even though there was only one bidder again, there was still a significant savings. We issued the Notice to Proceed last week, from which point Todd has 540 days to complete the 2nd boat. They may beat that milestone by a couple of weeks because the engineering work is the same. Then the 3rd boat is due to be complete in January of 2012; that boat will replace the Rhody on the Point Defiance / Tahlequah route. Our next step is to start building 144-car boats. We would like to go right into building the larger boats rather than a fourth 64-car boat.

Clarifying Questions from Audience

1. How green are the new boats?

They are much more fuel efficient than the steel electrics were. We have also run several experiments with bio-fuel, and we run three boats on B-20.

What is that?

It's a mixture that is 20% bio-fuel.

Is it ethanol?

It is non-petroleum products like animal fat and canola oil. In addition to that we have staff dedicated to keeping up with the expanding green fuel technologies; we're always looking for ways to be more efficient.

What was the result of your bio-fuel experiment?

The first time we tried it in 2005 we had a lot of issues with the filters clogging. This time we used a different blend and had much more success. The problem is really how to access the amount of bio-fuel that we need. The market is not big enough yet to support the 17 million gallons of fuel we use a year. We are currently working with our petroleum provider in Bellingham to see if we can get bio-fuel from them for the Anacortes boats.

2. Has there been any change in the status of the active restraint system?
This is referring to when the boats are at the dock; we have to run the motors to keep the boats pushed up against the dock as we unload and load. We are looking at ways to secure the boat to the dock better without having to rev the engines. There are a couple of systems out there that have promise. That is one of the ways we are looking at conserving fuel. Fuel is a huge expense, second only to labor for us.
3. You've also been slowing down the boats midday, correct?
Yes, on certain routes we are slowing them down. We are also using fewer engines in some boats; running them on 3 engines instead of 4. Are there any rules as to which Bainbridge run gets slowed down?
It's dependent on the particular run and the weather.
4. We only have the Hiyu as a backup boat right now. Will that last until we have all the new boats built?
At the end of the cycle when we have 5 new boats built we will have the 87-car Evergreen State class as a backup. It will be the Hiyu until then. The advantage with the Hiyu is that it can cross shipping lanes, whereas the Rhody cannot.

Vehicle Reservations Pre-Design Study

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley, WSF Operations and Project Manager Doug Schlieff

David introduced Doug as the project manager for the study. Doug has been with WSF for more than 30 years and is a daily ferry commuter. He brings a lot

of knowledge to the table. We wanted someone involved in this study that uses the ferries everyday and can ask the question: how would that work for me? Before I hand it over to Doug I want to clarify what exactly the Legislature has directed us to do. They have directed us to conduct a pre-design study of what a reservations system would look like. What would the IT / back office technology have to be to serve the needs of our customers? What business rules would need to be in place to make the system work well and be flexible? I want to be clear - the Legislature has not authorized us to implement reservations anywhere. They want to see the pre-design report to understand how reservations would work, and to make sure that it would be helpful to customers rather than an inconvenience. This is only worth doing if it can help our customers as well as help us spread our demand better.

Doug continued the discussion by explaining some of the reasons for reservations. Most have heard about the steel electrics being pulled from service. That event combined with the fact that our entire fleet is aging has led to all of the funding being directed toward building new boats. There is no funding for terminal expansion. There are congestion issues at our terminals, and because of the financial situation that the state is in we have had to identify some strategies that will allow us to better use the space that we have without expanding any of our facilities. A reservation system may be one way to mitigate some of the demand, reduce wait times, and cut down on the amount of vehicles idling at the tollbooths. It was identified in our Long Range Plan and the Legislature directed us to take a closer look at this possibility. If we were able to take the line at the tollbooth and turn it into a list of reserved cars, we could try to push the demand out to underutilized trips. If we are able to provide our customers with certainty about the boat they will be able to get on, so they can just come down and get on the boat, we may be able to attract more users by offering that service. By doing this we are trying to avoid having to expand our existing terminals.

The Legislature wants to know how this would work, what terminal processing enhancements we would need, the costs/benefits/risks, and the IT back office needs. As we go through the pre-design study, our first goal is to not limit our users' abilities to travel. Also, the system has to be easy to use and flexible. We want to improve our ferry communities' environments and mitigate expensive terminal construction. We sent out a Request for Information to the industry to determine what types of reservation programs are available off the shelf. We received six responses that were very useful, and helped us to see some features that our customers might like. We also contacted more than a dozen ferry systems around the world that use reservations, including some in England and Istanbul, Turkey. I personally visited BC Ferries, which has a very

successful reservations system. There are many similarities between our system and these other systems, but also many differences. We have benefited from learning about what has worked and not worked for these other systems.

We have also split up into work groups to pursue a variety of topics, one of which is the business rules that would need to be in place to accomplish our goals. We need these rules to be able to spread our demand better, but also to protect all of our different types of users. We needed to apply this study to a specific route, and we chose Edmonds / Kingston, which has turned out to be a great choice. It is a challenging route, which has all the different user types and also carries the most cars in our entire system. We formed a partnership group in July made up of a variety of users from both sides of that route, and we have been meeting to discuss the proposed system. They have been very constructive, asking lots of great questions, and we appreciate the time they have put in.

Next we are expected to present the draft pre-design report to the Legislature on December 15th. We have one more partnership meetings before then and lots of work to do. It is a huge task to bring together all of what we have learned. We envision that after the document is finalized, every route will be slightly different, and the pre-design report won't cover every characteristic of every route. We don't know what the future holds, we don't know if this will be implemented on some routes and not others; it may not be a one size fits all system.

Clarifying Questions from Audience

1. The traffic going to Kingston, if there are no reservations or standby room left, where do they go? Will you tell them they can't come in? How will you inform them?

This has been a heavy subject of discussion with us. We know it will be very key to notify the public well in advance that reservations are in effect, what is available, when to come, etc. That will be part of the IT back office technology, to use variable message signs, text messaging, online alerts. We're trying to identify every means of communication. Also, ideally there will be part of the terminal set aside for people to wait. For example, in Edmonds besides the 155-car holding area inside the tollbooths there are 2 lanes outside of the traveled way where we could stage the standby cars. The one furthest to the right has a barrier separating it from the traffic. Good signage will help make it very clear where you need to go.

2. Hypothetically it looks as though you will implement this at Kingston before Bainbridge?

We chose to study Edmonds / Kingston but that does not mean that we will go there first. We would want to first update the archaic systems we already have in place at Anacortes / Sidney and Port Townsend /



Keystone. A number of routes could benefit from this and we're not sure where we would go after that. We want to complete the pre-design study and see what the Legislature says to do.

My concern is that you will have the system at Edmonds and not put it in at Bainbridge. I would want them to be simultaneous. Unlike the other routes, these two are interchangeable and I'm concerned that if you have reservations only at Kingston you will flood Bainbridge.

That's a good point.

3. What percentage of the Port Townsend riders are using reservations?
We reserve 70% of the boat and leave 30% open for drive-ups. I get alerts when the reservations are full and I receive them frequently even in the winter.

Is it meeting your goal of moving cars to lower demand sailings?

It did initially, but now we have lots of vacancies and we're seeing the vehicle queue again because of 'no shows' or reservation holders not showing for their sailing. We will implement a required deposit next spring to address the no shows. The Anacortes / Sidney no-show rate dropped from 30% to about 3% when we implemented a deposit.

4. If I miss my reservation on the 7:00 boat, can I get on the 7:30 and not lose my money?

You would have to contact us and change the reservation or show up sometime that day or you would lose your money.

5. In the interim you should encourage people to use shorter cars with the fare structure.

Yes I had a meeting about this earlier and we discussed priority loading for smart cars. I want to make that part of the conversation over the next year: a fare discount for small cars, or some sort of priority loading for them similar to the vanpools.

6. When it comes to getting the word out to the public about the capacity levels on the boats, BC Ferries has a wonderful relationship with CBC radio. You can be almost anywhere and tune in for capacity levels and wait times; it's a wonderful service.

We need to use every communication tool available to us.

You could use KUOW.

7. The DOT website has estimated travel times based on historical patterns; if you could look that information up for the ferries that would be useful.
8. Will this be part of the presentation to the Legislature? You need to market it to them so they will fund it.

Absolutely. We want to make things better for our customers.

9. When you market it to them you might mention that this is the year of the National Parks. We want people to come here and spend money. The Olympic National Park has more visitors than Yellowstone, but they have

to be able to get there. If they have a bad experience they won't come back.

10. My concern is that a lot of runs are full, not just a few. I question the ability of this to work when we have 6-8 hour blocks of sailings full. How can you shift that to other runs? For what little shift you will get in return for punishing people for having unpredictability in their schedules, the value does not outweigh the cost.

We have heard that concern. The system has to be flexible; people can't be locked into a sailing. We have some ideas about how to achieve that. I fully appreciate the constraints you are under, but all the things on the table seem to be aimed at reducing the demand rather than addressing the inevitable increase.

11. People tend to not want to pay for the toll roads in the morning, but they pay when they want to get home. You might see the same pattern with reservations.

Preparing for the 2010 Legislative Session

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley

David discussed the upcoming 2010 Legislative session. As you know WSF was front and center during the 2009 Legislative session, with Plan B in the spotlight. We don't anticipate that same attention in the 2010 session. There are some important things they have asked to see; the reservations pre-design study is one of those. Also they want to see a new accident and incident investigation policy, fuel conservation targets, and information regarding a fuel surcharge in case gas prices spike again. Those are some issues that will be discussed; these are reports on things that the Legislature has asked us to look at, but they are not hot-button issues like the Long-Range Plan last year and the vessel and terminal issues. The JTC (Joint Transportation Committee) is doing a study on alternative funding options for transportation, because the gas tax is dropping as cars become more fuel efficient. In 2016 there is a one billion dollar gap in funding for the ferry system, and we need to fill that gap. That discussion will be occurring more in the 2011 session, but we need to be ready and at the table for those discussions. If there is a comprehensive transportation package for the Legislature to consider we need to be a part of it.

Clarifying Questions from Audience

1. BC Ferries needed more money so they became private. Puget Sound Energy sold its company to Aquarius in Australia. There are other ways to find money.



There is no question of that. However, BC Ferries is three times as expensive to ride on. They also charge a fee to make a reservation; we will not do that.

It's a good idea to charge a fee.

As a government agency we cannot penalize those with fewer resources; private companies can do that.

The Legislature will be looking at those models as well; be prepared.

2. Are there other ideas besides privatization being discussed?

There is an ongoing effort that will be reported on at the 2010 session. Alternative funding sources are being looked at because the gas tax is steadily declining as cars are becoming more fuel efficient. Tolling is one of the alternatives being looked at; we already have a toll. It will be reported in this session and then that information will guide the 2011 discussion about a comprehensive transportation package.

3. What do you think of the House Bill 2230 to change your name to Washington State Marine Highways?

I think its fine; that's what we are.

Will it open the door for more WSDOT funds?

We already are part of WSDOT.

So it won't change anything?

No, it's just a name. The money to build the new ferries came from WSDOT.

4. Is anyone looking at the option to treat WSF as a mass transit agency rather than a highway?

We already are a hybrid of the two.

But you have a fare box recovery of 80%; most transit agencies are around 20%.

All transit agencies are subsidized. We need to look for a non-gas tax revenue stream that can support the capital program. We need it very soon or we will not be able to build the 144-car boats and we will have a smaller system.

5. The Long Range Plan mentioned some price changes. How will those be implemented? Is that like a super summer surcharge or adjusting the multi-ride fare for the summer?

That was proposed and then withdrawn. The plan did suggest the concept of raising the passenger fares more slowly than the vehicle fares. There was specific legislation that came out and said no so we won't be doing that. One thing we might implement is a discount for shorter vehicles. Right now our cutoff is 20'. If we could do 10' then we would effectively be "growing" the boat.



6. I have an operational question. The viaduct earthquake video has garnered lots of attention. In the event of that type of incident, is your plan for the Colman dock to allow passenger transit if the ramps are useable?
Our service would become emergency response based, and then after things are stabilized we could look at passenger service. We would want to get back to regular operations as soon as possible.
Would it be from 72 hours to a week? What's your estimate of how long it would take to get back to normal?
I think it would be a substantial amount of time if the event in the video occurs. Our entire dock was useless by the end of that enactment.
7. In the Long Range Plan the enclosure of the smoking areas was eliminated somewhere along the line. Will that come back?
That was part of the 2006 draft. Our determination is that the passenger loads won't grow enough to justify needing that space.
I've seen people sit on the floor because no seats are available. With 37% growth and nothing on the schedule for Bainbridge until 2030, can we at least get some more passenger capacity?
We can reopen that issue at a later time.
8. With the earthquake question, I'd like to add that the Agate Pass bridge would be shutdown until it is inspected which would take quite awhile. When there's an accident on that bridge it backs up 305 all the way to the ferry on both sides. If the bridge is incapacitated and you're bringing more cars from Seattle we would be in trouble.
The Hiya would come into play at that point.
9. You need information posted on the Colman side if there is an issue with that bridge.
That is part of the improved communication system we need to have.

Conclusion

There were no further public comments or questions. David thanked everyone for coming. Meeting was adjourned.